For Christ and Country: The Anti-Semitic Anticommunism of Christian Front Street Meetings in New York City

Gene Fein

> Communism is atheism and where there is Communism, Christianity goes out the door.
> —Joseph Trebuh, August 8, 1939[1]

"For Christ and Country, I open this meeting in the name of the Christian Front! The leader of the Christian Front is Jesus Christ": these words marked the beginning of a typical Christian Front (CF) street meeting in New York City on July 6, 1939. Daniel Kurtz, leader of the Queens Unit of the Christian Front in New York City and often chairman of Christian Front meetings, took the speakers' stand, which was a stepladder and a large American flag on the corner of Springfield Boulevard and Jamaica Avenue in Queens Village, and began to speak to a crowd of 150 people. Kurtz proclaimed that a minority in Russia, which he identified as mostly Jews, forced the majority of Russians to live under Communist rule, "by a bloody revolution and the murderous slaughter of about 30,000,000 Christians, four times the number of soldiers lost in the World's War." Kurtz charged that this Communist plot was actually hatched on the lower east side of Manhattan by a Jew, Jacob "Shifty" Schiff[2] of Kuhn-Loeb and Company, who turned over a large sum of money to a man named Bronstein. Upon Bronstein's arrival in Russia he changed his name to Leon Trotsky. The conspiracy was now coming full circle, according to Kurtz: Trotsky, currently in Mexico, was organizing a military force to be ready for a world war that would involve the United

1. Det. William A. Justy to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, August 9, 1939; Report of Meeting, Sgt. Lynch, 43 Pct., and Det. Justy, Alien Squad, August 8, 1939, New York City Municipal Archives, Organization-Christian Front file, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers, microfilm roll 149. The Organization-Christian Front file will be cited as OFC and the Fiorello LaGuardia Papers as FLP from this point forward.

2. Jacob Schiff was one of an influential group of Jewish businessmen that dominated Jewish organizations in the 1920s. See Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 46–47.

States. Trotsky's plan was to smuggle his cohorts into the United States, where they would be joined by comrades already residing in this country and launch a communist revolution while American forces would be fighting in Europe.[3]

This is the story of the rise and fall of the Christian Front, the most militant and extreme group in the history of Catholic anticommunism. Through its anticommunism, the Christian Front hoped to achieve its ultimate goal—a return to a Christian America accomplished through Christian unity. Its commitment to "Americanism" throughout 1939 intensified at the same rate as warnings about the dangers of communism. Whether in the South Bronx, Hell's Kitchen, or Ozone Park, Christian Front's Americanism was tied to a sense that America was a Christian country, founded by and for Christians and not for Jews.

Christian Fronters were redefining the traditional meaning of American nativism, originally American-born Protestantism, to a nativism that included Catholic immigrants—a Christian, that is, Catholic and Protestant, Americanism. Fronters were appealing to audiences in neighborhoods with a substantial percentage of Catholic immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Poland, in addition to Protestant and Catholic Germans. Jews in these mixed neighborhoods were the foils, even though there was the occasional invitation to them to join the fight against communism. The allure of the Christian Front to these immigrants, who were defined by traditional American nativists as outsiders, was that they too were true Americans simply by being anticommunist Christians.

The use of American historical symbolism was commonplace in the Christian Front's definition of Christian Americanism. America, "our Christian nation," was "discovered, founded, and organized under the auspices of Christianity." Fronter Michael Flanagan declared, "America was founded on Christianity and it must be restored to it in the near future . . . communists were trying to destroy our great American flag." Herman Schmidt warned that communists were "attempting to replace the American flag with the Hammer and Sickle." Martin Ryan stressed the need for all Christians to unite to restore "Christian America to the Christians again, as it was 160 years ago." Otherwise, as William Massey cautioned, the "blood shed by our forefathers to build this great nation" would have been in vain.[4]

By claiming that American legal institutions, notably the Constitution and Supreme Court, were fundamental elements of Christian Americanism, the Front gave

3. This story persisted and was repeated by Raymond Dalton on September 7. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, September 8, 1939, OFC.

4. Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 11, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, July 21, 1939; Det. William A. Justy to Commanding Officer, Bureau of Criminal Alien Investigation, August 4, 1939; Police Report, August 15, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 16, 1939; Report of Meeting, Lt. Handwerg, 30 Pct., and Ptl. Owsianik, Alien Squad, August 22, 1939; Police Report; August 23, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, October 21, 1939, OFC.

their movement an air of legitimacy. Daniel Kurtz held a wooden cross above his head not far from the beach in Far Rockaway in late September and proclaimed, "This cross of Christianity will bring this Country back to its Christian owners and this is the cross of happiness."[5] Fronters claimed the Supreme Court had declared the United States a Christian country. Any attempts to limit the Front's free speech and right to public assembly constituted "un-Americanism" and were attacks on both Americanism and Christianity. The Front defended "Our Constitutional rights to band together as Christians" because "our Constitution states that this is a Christian nation . . . our forefathers had the keen sense to foresee something like this and that is why they inserted in the Constitution the right of assemblage and the right of free speech."[6]

The most active year for the Father Charles Coughlin–inspired Christian Front in New York City was 1939. Coughlin had called for the creation of a Christian Front the year before. His intention was to organize Catholics for battle against what he claimed was the greatest social problem facing America—the threat of a communist revolution, one that involved a disproportionate number of Jews.[7]

On May 23, 1938, Coughlin announced the creation of the Million League, an umbrella for smaller Social Justice Platoons of twenty-five members; each of the twenty-five members of a platoon would then contact another twenty-five individuals, and so the platoons would spread. The units were loosely organized with no direct organizational connections to each other. As Coughlin said, the platoons were "directly affiliated with me." At first, people were surprised at the military connotations of "platoon," but the reason for the terminology soon became evident. Coughlin announced in the June 27, 1938, edition of his journal *Social Justice* that there were forces within America intent on destroying American liberty. Led by clever and scheming minds, these forces were "engineering the mechanism of a juggernaut of hatred, slavery and death." The only salvation for America was a Christian Front—an obvious play on the communist "Popular Front." The "radio priest" warned Americans of all the "isms" that were prepared to "plung[e] its dagger into YOU." The blade of this dagger was communism, and the only way to dull the blade was if every Christian man and woman in the United States, regardless of age or creed, stood "shoulder to shoulder." On November 6, 1938, he proclaimed, "It is necessary for us to solidify and strengthen a virile, closely woven Christian Front."[8]

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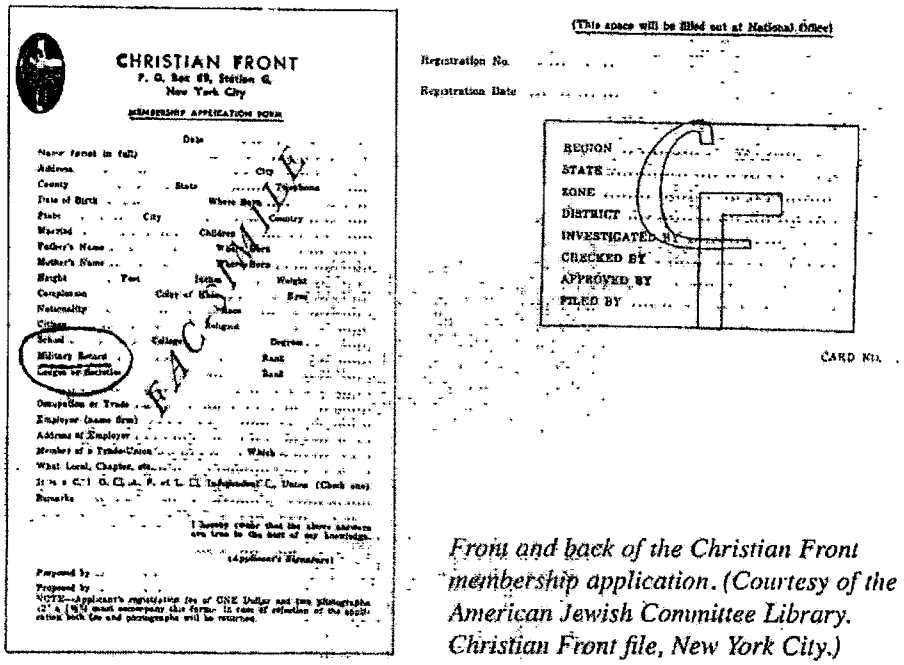
5. Police Report, September 23, 1939, OFC.

6. Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Alien Squad, August 30, 1939; Police Report, September 6, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939; Police Report, September 15, 1939; Police Report, August 23, 1939, OFC.

7. Ronald H. Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 97. Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 254–55. Sheldon Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 154.

8. Harold C. Urey, et. al., letter to Frank Murphy, January 18, 1940; Thomas E. Stone to Robert Jackson, January 19, 1940; O. John Rogge to Harold Kennedy, January 20, 1940; Harold Kennedy to O. John Rogge, January 22, 1940; O. John Rogge to Thomas E. Stone, January 23, 1940; all in *United States of America v. John Prout, Jr., et. al.*, United States Attorney's Files, file 10500, box 8, (E. D. NY 1940), Case


CHRISTIAN FRONT
F. O. Box 69, Station G
New York City

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

(This space will be filled out at National Office)

Registration No.

Registration Date

REGION
STATE
ZONE
DISTRICT
INVESTIGATED BY
CHECKED BY
APPROVED BY
FILED BY

CARD NO.

Front and back of the Christian Front membership application. (Courtesy of the American Jewish Committee Library. Christian Front file, New York City.)

The constitution for New York City's Christian Front was adopted August 11, 1938. John F. Cassidy,[9] a former Fordham University student and 1931 graduate of St. John's Law School, organized one of the first platoons, meeting in the rectory of Saint Paul the Apostle Church in Manhattan.[10] Cassidy, president of the 5th Congressional District unit of the National Union for Social Justice in 1936, first joined organized anti-communism with Russell Dunn, who had ties with the ultrapatriotic and anti-Semitic American Nationalist Party. Both joined demonstrations in the spring of 1938 in Flatbush, Brooklyn, as members of the Christian American Citizens' Committee Against Communism, and they created the Flatbush Anti-Communist League and the Flatbush Common Cause League. In March 1939 Cassidy was appointed leader of the Christian Front Brooklyn Unit by CF president Marcel Honore.[11]

Number 38022, National Archives and Records Administration, Northeast Division, New York. *United States of America v. John Prout, Jr., et. al.*, United States Attorney's Files shall hereafter be referred to as USAJP-AF. *Social Justice*, May 23, 1938, 8; June 27, 1938, 23; July 11, 1938, 23; "What Is the Christian Front?" *Propaganda Analysis* 3 no. 5 (January 20, 1940): 1–2, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, New Hyde Park, N.Y. Marcus, *Father Coughlin*, 68.

9. Cassidy later became a defendant in *USA v. John Prout, Jr., et. al.*

10. Statement of William Bushnell and testimony of John F. Cassidy, USAJP-CCF, box 614, vol. VII, 3395–96. Statement of Francis Malone, January 14, 1940, USAJP-AF, box 10. Charles J. Cooke, "Don't Quote Me," *Christian Front* (June 1939): 84; *New York Times*, September 26, 1939, 24. Alson Jesse Smith, *The Christian Front: Coughlin's Storm Troopers* (New York: American League for Peace and Democracy, 1939), 19. "What Is the Christian Front?," 1–2.

11. *Certificate of Incorporation of Christian Front, Inc.*, USAJP-AF, box 6; testimony of John F. Cassidy, USAJP-CCF, box 614, vol. VII, 3382, 3384, 3387–90, 3392, 3395–96, 3405, 3413. Testimony of John

The Christian Front's activities in New York City during the summer of 1939 caught the attention of antifascist New York congressman Samuel Dickstein, who publicly questioned why the Christian Front had not been investigated when they were openly calling for the overthrow of democracy. He said that New York was overrun with Fronters and these subversives must be stopped to prevent blood in the streets and acts of sabotage. To keep European totalitarianism out of America, Dickstein demanded that the Christian Front be exposed as a fascist front. He equated the Christian Front's tactics with the Gestapo and alleged that it was financially supported by leaders directly in Nazi employ and propped up by German propaganda.[12] The congressman's concerns eventually led to an FBI investigation and the arrest of eighteen members of the Christian Front on January 14, 1940. Seventeen of those arrested stood trial (*United States of America v. John Prout, Jr., et. al.*) between January and June 1940, accused of conspiring to overthrow the government of the United States in a bizarre plot to establish a right-wing dictatorship and eliminate the Jews.[13]

In the year leading up to the arrests and trial, crowds numbering between 100 and 400 gathered on street corners in the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn to hear, and occasionally heckle, Christian Front speakers. During the summer months of 1939, when the weather was better for outdoor meetings, police reported crowds of as many as 500 to 900. Fronters usually gathered in the evenings, around 6:00 or 7:00, and remained on the street for several hours. They selected locations for their street meetings where they could attract large crowds. Columbus Circle (only one block away from St. Paul's Church), Times Square, and Herald Square in Manhattan and Westchester Square in the Bronx were favorite spots for rallies. Other street corners, especially in the outer boroughs, were selected near subway or elevated train stations, locations that were easy to get to and that provided crowds returning home from work.[14] Street meetings were occasionally marked with violence, but most arrests were for heckling or for disorderly conduct and abusive language. More often than not, police officers simply removed the hecklers from the crowd.[15]

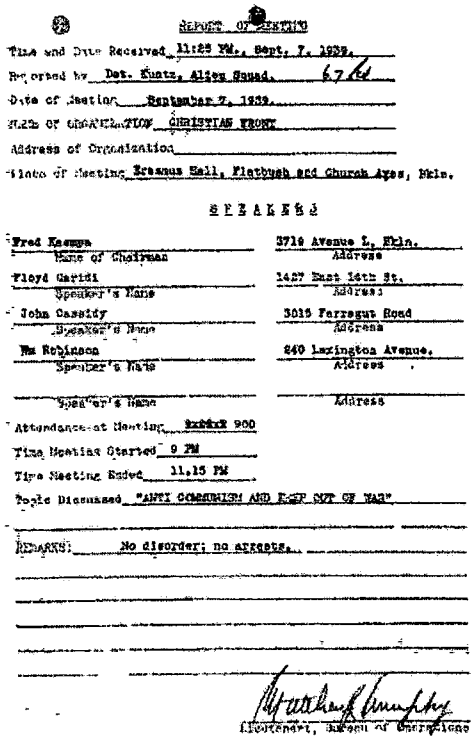
Graf, USAJP, box 615, vol. VI, 3164. Marcel Honore to John Cassidy, March 1939, USAJP-AF, box 7. Harold C. Urey, et. al., to Frank Murphy, USAJP-AF, box 8. *New York Times*, January 16, 1940. Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict*, 97. Edward C. McCarthy, "The Christian Front Movement in New York City, 1938–1940" (master's thesis, Columbia University, 1965), 8.

12. *App. Cong. Rec.*, August 2, 1939, 4042–45; *New York Times*, September 30, 1939.

13. Ronald Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 102. USAJP-CCF, box 611, vol. V, 2280. Charge of Jury, USAJP-CCF, box 610, 5764.

14. Some of the favorite train stations were the stop at Crosby Avenue and Burhre Avenue, the 138th Street stop at Brook Avenue, and the Cypress Avenue IRT stops in the Bronx; the East 31st Street and Church Avenue, and Flatbush Avenue and Germania Place IRT stops and 86th Street and Fourth Avenue BMT stop in Brooklyn; and the Lefferts Boulevard and Liberty Avenue El train stop in Queens.

15. Police removed hecklers at street meetings of May 13, May 19, June 1, June 22, and July 3 and a drunken heckler on August 22, September 26, and September 28, 1939. See police reports in OFC. For a list of speakers arrested see Nathan Frankel and Byrnes MacDonald to Fiorello LaGuardia, Final Report: Activities of Anti-Semitic Groups Within New York City, November 6, 1939, Christian Front file, FLP, microfilm roll 19. Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict*, 100.



REPORT OF MEETING

Time and Date Received 11:25 PM., Sept. 7, 1939.

Reported by Det. Kuntz, Alien Squad. 67th

Date of Meeting September 7, 1939.

Name of Organization CHRISTIAN FRONT

Address of Organization

Place of Meeting Erasmus Hall, Flatbush and Church Aves., Bkln.

SPEAKERS

Fred Kasmir Name of Chairman	3719 Avenue I, Bkln. Address
Floyd Caridi Speaker's Name	1427 East 16th St. Address
John Cassidy Speaker's Name	3015 Farragut Road Address
Wm Robinson Speaker's Name	240 Lexington Avenue. Address
Speaker's Name	Address

Attendance at Meeting 900

Time Meeting Started 9 PM

Time Meeting Ended 11.15 PM

Topic Discussed "ANTI COMMUNISM AND KEEP OUT OF WAR"

REMARKS: No disorder; no arrests.

Lieutenant, Intelligence Division

Police report of Christian Front activity. (Courtesy of New York City Municipal Archives, Organization-Christian Front file, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers, New York City.)

New York Police Department officers, detectives, and police stenographers attended, observed, and issued reports on 272 Christian Front events between April 15, 1939, and January 12, 1940—two days before eighteen CF members were arrested by the FBI.[16] Many of these reports were sent to the commanding officer of the Alien Investigation Bureau. I used these reports to determine speaker identities, topics and locations of CF street meetings, members-only meetings, pickets, and literature distribution. Eight hundred forty-five different speeches covering 1,503 topics were delivered at these events.

Many speeches covered more than one topic. By far, anticommunism, discussed 304 times (20.23 percent), and Christian unity, discussed 441 times (29.34 percent), were the favorite topics of Christian Front speakers. In some cases, police department representatives recorded speeches verbatim. In other cases, only single sentences indicated a general theme, such as "anticommunism" or "Americanism." For purposes of this article I will focus only on speeches on anticommunism, as well as speeches that

16. For purposes of this article, I chose to end the study on the last report filed before the Fronters were arrested. The arrests were a watershed event in the New York City Christian Front movement that dramatically changed the tenor of their meetings, focusing on a battle between the federal government and the movement. I wished to study the psychology of the CF before it was altered by the proactive involvement of the government.

tied Americanism and Christian unity directly to the Christian Front's anticommunism rhetoric.

New York City neighborhoods that most often witnessed Christian Front anticommunism-themed speeches were the South Bronx, Fordham-University Heights-Belmont, and Throgs Neck in the Bronx; Hell's Kitchen (including Columbus Circle rallies), Washington Heights-Inwood, and Harlem in Manhattan; and Hollis-Queens Village, Ozone Park-Richmond Hill, and Far Rockaway in Queens. The Christian Front speakers were usually residents of the neighborhoods (or at least the borough) where they spoke.[17]

The Bronx and Manhattan neighborhoods that saw CF rallies were 23–33 percent foreign-born, usually a mixture of Irish, Italian, German, Polish, and Jewish immigrants. The ratios of nationalities where CF activity took place varied in different places. The majority in Harlem neighborhoods was Irish; Washington Heights was both Irish and German, and Fordham was heavily Italian. The South Bronx was almost evenly divided between Irish, German, and Jewish immigrants and was the location of more Christian Front anticommunism street meetings than any other neighborhood.

The Queens neighborhoods were only 12–18 percent immigrant, although the ethnicities were predominantly the same as the Bronx and Manhattan neighborhoods. Far Rockaway was the only neighborhood where Jewish foreign-born heads of households outnumbered other immigrants (slightly more than Irish residents), albeit the total number was very low. It was in this neighborhood that the Christian Front met some of its greatest resistance, according to police reports.

Christian Front anticommunists were responding to the same world situation as other anticommunists of the 1930s. The challenge was for anticommunists to oppose communism without seeming to support Hitler and without weakening the antifascist coalition. The Christian Front was organized when many American Catholics feared communism and its impact on the Catholic Church at home and abroad, and this outweighed any concern about the danger of fascism.[18] Their focus was squarely on protecting Christian America from destruction at the hands of communists.

Christian Front anticommunism advocated aggressive attacks on communists, but they did not see this as a first-strike, offensive strategy. Fronters thought they were engaging in self-defense of Christianity and Americanism. This did not mean they never

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17. Addresses of meetings were listed on police reports. I used the *"Geographia" Atlas of Greater New York* (New York: C. S. Hammond, 1937) to plot the meetings and determine neighborhoods. Neighborhood names are those used in the late 1930s, hence the use of "Hell's Kitchen." To determine populations and ethnic demographics of neighborhoods, I used the census tracts as outlined in United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, New York City: 1940* (New York: Welfare Council Committee on 1940 Census Tract Tabulations for New York City, September 1942). If a street meeting took place at an intersection between two or more census tracts, I counted all bordering tracts to determine ethnicity of the neighborhood. I relied on Ronald Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict*, 214 n. 8, to consider those listed in the census as "Russian" as Jewish.

18. Powers, *Not Without Honor*, 117.

made direct threats against communists or communist sympathizers, and often the more aggressive Fronters were no strangers to violence. Joseph Hartery had been fired from his job for attempting to attack a coworker with an axe and had been arrested for threatening a man with a knife. He opened a street meeting by announcing that if there were any communists in the audience they better leave. Hartery, known as "Little Napoleon" and described by John Roy Carlson as an "undersized, pug-faced man with a large metal cross pinned on his shirt," liked to talk about a hammer and sickle painted on the wall of St. Paul's Church. This incident of Christian victimization, he said, "aroused the temper of Christian people and they would stand for no more of the disorder and destruction caused by Communists."[19]

Anticommunism as defense of Christianity was reflected in both Christian Front pamphlets and street meetings. A pamphlet entitled "Anti-Communism is Christian Self-Defense!!," reprinted in a letter by C. F. Bree in the *Brooklyn Tablet*, complained that American Federation of Musicians union members, Local 802, were forced to play free concerts by the union's Jewish leadership to support "Spanish Democracy," even though the "real purpose behind all that interest in Spain is the destruction of Christianity." Bree appealed for an end to the "embarrassment" of Christian members having to participate in activities promoting their own destruction.[20] Speakers echoed these sentiments on street corners throughout 1939, often in a more base manner, referring to communists as "lunatics," "idiots," and "low animals."[21] Outlandish claims were made, such as a bogus *New York Times* report that a picture of Franklin Roosevelt had been hung in Moscow in 1931, before he was nominated by the 1932 Democratic Committee, with the caption "President of the United States Soviet America."[22]

Christian Front anti-internationalism and blatantly anti-Semitic anticommunism were often intertwined. The terms "internationalist" or "internationalist bankers" were euphemisms for Jews. Of course, Coughlinites were far from the first to make this connection. Henry Ford had published the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* under the title "The International Jew," accusing Jews of conspiring to overthrow Christian civilization.[23]

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19. Police Report, June 14, 1939, OFC. John Roy Carlson [Avedis Derounian], *Under Cover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underground* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1943), 76. Hartery's criminal record is outlined in State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Who Are the Leaders of the "Christian Mobilizers"?* (New York: Organization Council of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights, 1939). Carlson repeats the information concerning arrests in the pamphlet nearly word for word.

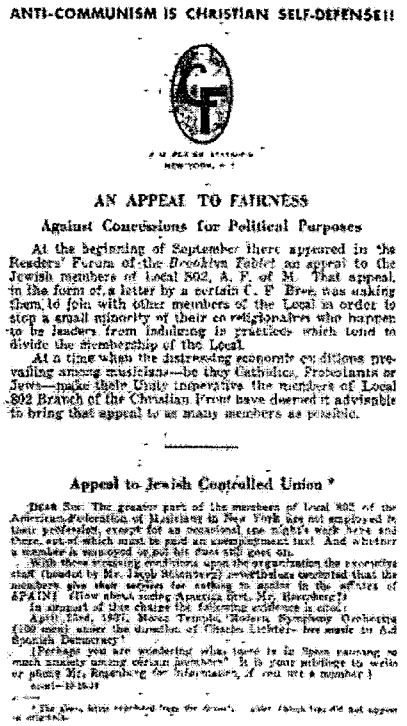
20. Pamphlets located in Christian Front file, American Jewish Committee Library, New York. This will be cited as AJCL from this point forward.

21. Police Report, July 26, 1939, OFC.

22. Det. Joseph Carrington to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 31, 1939; Police Report, August 16, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 25, 1939; Police Report, August 29, 1939; Police Report, October 7, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, October 11, 1939, OFC.

23. Egal Feldman, *Catholics and Jews in Twentieth Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 46.

"The Christina Front" (Courtesy of the American Jewish Committee Library, Christian Front file, New York City.)


ANTI-COMMUNISM IS CHRISTIAN SELF-DEFENSE!!
AN APPEAL TO FAIRNESS
Against Coercions for Political Purposes
Appeal to Jewish Controlled Union

"Anticommunism is self-defense." (Courtesy of the American Jewish Committee Library, Christian Front file, New York City.)

Father Coughlin's attacks on "internationalists" was one of his favorite radio broadcast topics in 1939.[24] International finance, which he claimed was dominated by atheistic Jews, caused the misery of the masses of innocent Jews and Gentiles. He used the "international Jew" and international bankers as scapegoats for the corruption, abuse, and destruction of capitalism, which would allow communism to rise to power.[25] For example, he accused the House of Rothschild, the "age-old banking group that holds most of Western Europe in hock," of pushing America into another war to save international bankers.[26]

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24. Coughlin was heard on WHBI (Newark, N.J.) in the New York metropolitan area in 1939. WMCA in New York City refused to carry Coughlin's broadcasts at the end of 1938. For the WMCA controversy, see Marcus, *Father Coughlin*, 160–65.

25. See also the June 4, 1939, broadcast. "Father Coughlin's Anti-Semitism," *Memorandum on Father Coughlin and Social Justice*, American Jewish Committee (1940), AJCL.

26. May 28, 1939, radio broadcast and repeated in "Father Coughlin's Anti-Semitism," *Social Justice*, June 5, 1939; and "Anti-Semitism in *Social Justice*," *Memorandum on Father Coughlin and Social Justice*, American Jewish Committee (1940), AJCL.

Once war erupted in Europe there was little question in Coughlin's mind who was at fault and what the ramifications would be for America. It was the international bankers who caused the "carnival of corpses" for the "handful of usurers who gained their fortune" and "who own us" (Christian Americans). Congress had to decide whether to

> keep us free or sell us into bondage to the international bankers, the international politicians, the international war-mongers, and the international plunder bunds whose spokesmen . . . unctuously will try to entice us into this maelstrom of murder to stop Hitler and will continue to create more Hitlers so long as they dominate the destinies of the world.

Even if the war promoted economic recovery, it would be a false recovery, risking Americanism and Christianity for internationalists' "blood profits."[27]

With war looming at the end of August 1939, Joe Leveque denounced Jewish international bankers for victimizing Christians under the guise of communism:

> The international bankers are another bunch of slaughterers. They're the ones who helped to kill the Christians in the foreign countries of Europe. They are no good. They slaughter people for gold. They are always scheming in some way to get money and take everything away from you Christians, just like they have for the past 2000 years. We're not going to let them do it any longer. I have no use for these kikes. Communist and socialist organizations are fronts for Jews. They are all for 'Jewism.' The international bankers are murderers of the Christians. They take pleasure in this.[28]

Coughlin's radio broadcasts and newspaper editorials were the basis for much of the Christian Front's agitation. Just a week after Coughlin blamed international bankers for starting the war in Europe, his sentiments were echoed at Columbus Circle. Citing Father Coughlin as the only man in the United States "who knows how to tell us the truth," George Boian urged that America should stay out of the war, just as Father Coughlin demanded. James Sard followed by proclaiming the three greatest men of the day were Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco because they were the only hope against international communism. He continued with praise for the "greatest priest that ever lived, Father Coughlin . . . he exposed the names of the Bolsheviks, such as: Kuhn-Loeb, Jewish International Bankers, by telling the truth."[29]

The viciousness of Christian Front attacks on international communism was intensified when they fueled their anticommunism with their anti-Semitism. Sometimes the attacks resorted to simple name calling, "They're nothing but kikes . . . they are specialists in rape; their belief tells them that they can violate a Christian girl and get away with it," and chanting: "Down with Communism, Down with Jews."[30] However, anti-

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27. September 17, 1939, radio broadcast, "Father Coughlin's Anti-Semitism," *Memorandum on Father Coughlin and Social Justice*, American Jewish Committee (1940), AJCL.

28. Ptl. Francis L. Hillick to Commanding Officer, Third Division, August 29, 1939, OFC.

29. Ptl. Francis L. Hillick to Commanding Officer, Third Division, September 26, 1939, OFC.

30. Police Report, May 25, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, June 30, 1939; Ptl. Francis L. Hillick to Commanding Officer, Third Division, August 29, 1939,

Semitic anticommunism went beyond Jew-baiting and taunting. Jewish failure to support Catholics' claims of communist brutality in Russia and Spain while asking for support against Hitler's regime in Germany struck Fronters as hypocrisy and became a source of anti-Semitism and a reason to call for unity in defense of all Christian faiths.[31] "God help any Jew or Communist that tries to break up this meeting," Joe Hartery warned the 600 or 700 Bronxites gathered on the corner of 138th Street and Willis Avenue.[32]

Father Coughlin certainly fueled this fire by broadcasting and printing stories in *Social Justice* implying a connection between the Roosevelt administration and Jewish communists. One fantastic story described a September 1938 covert conference in Paris between New Dealer Henry Morganthau Jr. and Jewish communist operatives. Even when Coughlin was called to task and was forced to retract the story because Morganthau was not in France at that time, he still implied that conspiracy between the administration and international communists existed when he stated, "I am aware that he [Morganthau] was not there physically, but I am also aware that he was there spiritually."[33] On the street, these stories were repeated with accusations that the president and the New Deal were an attempt to run the U.S. government on the same principles as Soviet Russia, filling government positions with "International agents and fellow travelers."[34]

Christian Front members consistently denied being anti-Semitic. Albert Gunnison's "history" of the group squarely placed the accusations of anti-Semitism on the Jewish War Veterans, whose leadership had assured Jews that the CF was anti-Semitic, even after the CF had held a common meeting with the Jewish group. Other denials of anti-Semitism attempted to distinguish between condemning the "Red Jew" and the "democratic Jew" and claimed the only place there was anti-Semitism was in Russia, where they "chase out the good Jews and keep the Red Jew. Hitler chased out the Red Jew and kept the good Jew in the country," implying that same strategy should be implemented in America.[35]

As vicious as these anti-Semitic attacks were, they constituted only 16 percent of all topics in anticommunist speeches. This is not to say that the Christian Front was not

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OFC. Murray Garrson to Fiorello LaGuardia, "Confidential Report on Outdoor Anti-Semitic Meetings Submitted by the Anti-Defamation League," August 12, 1939, Christian Front file, FLP, microfilm roll 18. Nathan Frankel and Byrnes MacDonald to Fiorello LaGuardia, Final Report: Activities of Anti-Semitic Groups Within New York City, November 6, 1939, Christian Front file, FLP, microfilm roll 19.

31. Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Information Bureau, July 7, 1939, OFC. Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict*, 99–100. Marcus, *Father Coughlin*, 181.

32. Police Report, June 16, 1939, OFC.

33. "Report on Anti-Democratic Statements of Father Coughlin and Social Justice," *Memorandum on Father Coughlin and Social Justice*, American Jewish Committee (1940), AJCL. Marcus, *Father Coughlin*, 192–98.

34. Police Report, August 10, 1939, OFC.

35. Allen J. Santry, Christian Front Speaker, to Patrick Scanlan, Editor, *Brooklyn Tablet*, January 14, 1939, Tablet Subject Collection, Subject Files, Christian Front file, Diocese of Brooklyn Archives. Police Report, August 18, 1939; Police Report, July 23, 1939, OFC.

thoroughly anti-Semitic, or that they did not use anti-Semitism in an attempt to strengthen their call for Christian unity. Certainly there was ethnic conflict, as Ronald Bayor's seminal work proves.[36] It is to say that anti-Semitism was not the main focus of their anticommunism, but it was a weapon in their anticommunism.

Whenever Christian Fronters spoke about anticommunism, their overwhelming focus was on the international atrocities perpetrated by communists and how to prevent those same atrocities from spreading to the United States. Stories of the terror and destruction caused by communism throughout the world and how it was a direct threat to America (the imminent invasion) accounted for 41 percent of all anticommunism speech topics in police reports. These stories of brutal persecution, murder, and rape of nuns, priests, and lay Christians at the hands of communists in Russia, Spain, and Mexico were offered as tangible evidence for the need to defend the Cross of Christ.[37]

American Catholics were aroused by the United States' policy toward the Spanish Civil War. Non-Catholics tended to regard the war as a battle between democracy and fascism. Some Catholics, however, viewed the Republican side as essentially anti-Catholic, and much of the Catholic press asserted that the real issue in Spain was the communist-controlled government's assault on the Catholic Church.[38] Coughlinites described the Spanish war as "a conflict between Christianity and Communism, between Christianity and Satanocracy."[39]

General Francisco Franco became a model for preventing communist takeovers everywhere. The symbolism was so important for the Coughlinites that after the Spanish Civil War ended with a Franco victory on March 28, 1939, the Christian Front held a victory celebration in May.[40] Father Coughlin publicly endorsed Franco's methods, asserting that the only way to keep the communists from taking over the government was violence, the "Franco Way." Both Coughlin and Fronters reinforced the stereotype of evil, godless communism by invoking the carnage suffered by Catholics in Spain at the hands of the Loyalists with methods that "would shame the inquisition of Spain."[41]

The Christian Front sponsored showings of the film *Spain in Arms* as proof of communism's inhumanity.[42] At street meetings the descriptions of atrocities in Spain

36. Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict,* 155–62.

37. Police Report, June 17, 1939; Police Report, June 30, 1939; Police Report, July 5, 1939; Police Report, July 11, 1939; Police Report, August 31, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Alien Squad, August 30, 1939, OFC.

38. Powers, *Not Without Honor,* 134.

39. *An Answer to Father Coughlin's Critics, by Father Coughlin's Friends* (Royal Oak, Mich.: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1940), 110–11.

40. Police Report, May 20, 1939, OFC.

41. *Ave Maria,* March 25, 1939, 372; Charles J. Cooke, "Don't Quote Me," *Christian Front* (March 1939): 36; Robert Davis, "Franco, the Man," *Catholic Digest* 3 (May 1939): 85; J. David Valaik, "Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Embargo, 1937–1939," *Journal of American History* (June 1967): 81–82; "What Is the Christian Front?" 1–2. Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939, OFC.

42. Police Report, May 4, 1939; Det. Sam Goldhuber to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, December 2, 1939, OFC. Christian Front flyers, USAJP-AF, box 8; testimony of John F. Cassidy, USAJP-

became more and more exaggerated throughout 1939, especially as war drew near in Europe in late summer. In mid-July the Front claimed there had been crucifixions of thousands of Christians in Russia and Spain and that 27,000 priests and nuns were butchered in Spain by the communists. Two weeks later the horrors in Spain were described as "hundreds of thousands of Christian people, clergymen, and nuns were murdered, mutilated by the hands of so-called fighters for 'Democracy'"; by August the totals were "300,000 Christian men, women and children." Once a general war broke out in September 1939 the Front described "the butchering of 20,000,000 Christians in Europe in the past 20 years" and the slaughtering of over 400,000 "women, children, priests, nuns, and ministers" by the communists.[43]

The Coughlinites feared that hostilities in Europe increased the likelihood that the Roosevelt administration or Congress would overturn the Neutrality Acts and drag the United States into the war. If the United States became involved in a European war, American troops would not be available to defend against a communist invasion. Just one week before Germany invaded Poland, Fred Kemp warned that the radio news from Europe was nothing more than a communist trick to upset the American public to move the U.S. Army and Navy away from our shores, to leave the country unprotected. Five days after the German invasion of Poland, Daniel Kurtz embellished this notion by declaring that communists, who were specialists in taking over governments, wanted the United States to fight in Europe so that 230,000 of their comrades could enter the country from Mexico with the help of communists already entrenched in U.S. government key positions.[44] All the rhetoric in the streets was trying to prove one point: that a communist invasion and revolution, even if not inevitable, was highly probable. Time and again the CF reiterated their theme: the evil of communism in the United States must be "eliminated forever" to prevent the same persecution that occurred in Russia and Loyalist Spain.[45]

The Front warned that the "Zero hour!"—when the "threatening menace" would strike against the American public and "undermine the very foundation of our Republic, its economic structure, philosophy, and morale"—was near. Christians were told they "must get guns and put the Communists in front of us and shoot them first; clean

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CCF, box 614, vol. VII, 3475, 3541; testimony of William Gerald Bishop, USAJP-CCF, box 613, vol. VIII, 4432; testimony of Michael Vill, USAJP-CCF, box 614, vol. VII, 3665.

43. Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, July 14, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, July 28, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 16, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, September 29, 1939, OFC.

44. Police Report, August 26, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939, OFC.

45. Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, July 14, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, July 19, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, July 28, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, October 6, 1939, OFC.

the U.S. of the Bolsheviks." If the CF failed the result would be the end of Christian-American civilization. It was a "war between Christ and the anti-Christ."[46]

Preparations for the invasion were already underway, the Front warned, inside the United States and Mexico. These included returning Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans who had fought for Loyalists in Spain. Denounced for having enlisted in a foreign army and fighting in a revolution, the Lincoln Brigade, the CF complained, were still allowed to come back to America "unquestioned and glorified." The brigade veterans were called "Spanish murderers, who have killed hundreds of Christians including nuns, priests, and monks . . . who will reap a harvest and then go to Mexico to promote a revolution" at the invitation of Trotsky. The CF held street meetings "to urge people to be prepared for the day when uncontrollable hordes from Mexico would invade the country to terrorize Christianity."[47] Once in America, communists planned to overthrow the government by seizing power plants, water works, and arsenals, using the 10,000 guns they had already acquired under assumed names.[48]

A Fronter who called himself "Panama Bill"[49] played on racial fears when speaking on a predominately white block (93.6 percent) bordered by a predominately black population (42 percent) in Harlem.[50] Bill claimed a black secret service agent named White was sent with one hundred other Negroes from Harlem to Russia to study the latest methods for preparing a communist revolution. The communists promised them that at the end of the revolution they would be given several states in the South, where they could live as they choose.[51]

The Front made extravagant claims that it had a membership of one to five million men enrolled in the CF army to defend the Church and the country against the Reds and to battle against the revolution at their doorsteps. Speakers told crowds that the

46. Report of Meeting, Lt. Kelly, 104th Pct., September 1, 1939; Police Report, September 2, 1939; Police Report, September 11, 1939; Ptl. Francis L. Hillick to Commanding Officer, Third Division, September 26, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, September 29, 1939, OFC.

47. Det. William A. Justy to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigating Bureau, July 7, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, July 12, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 14, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, July 28, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 16, 1939; Det. William A. Kuntz to Commanding Officer, Alien Squad, September 8, 1939, OFC.

48. Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 2, 1939; Report of Meeting, Lt. Kelly, 104th Pct., September 1, 1939; Police Report, September 2, 1939; Police Report, September 15, 1939, OFC.

49. "Panama Bill" used several aliases. Police believed his real name was William Haggerty of Coney Island, Brooklyn. Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, July 12, 1939, OFC.

50. Bill spoke on the corner of 133rd Street and Amsterdam Avenue, which was located in tract 219. Tracts 213 (46 percent black), 215 (40 percent black), 217 (47 percent black) and 223 (41 percent black) immediately border tract 219, with a total black population of 11,948 of 28,615 residents. *Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, New York City: 1940*, 147.

51. Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, July 12, 1939, OFC

Christian Front army planned to form battalions and sports clubs in every CF unit for Christian men to strengthen their "minds and bodies in preparation for a revolution on our shores."[52]

The call for a Christian Front army was an example of its unity rhetoric. Speeches called for Christian youth in America to band together so that they would never experience the terrors of communism. Speakers specifically stated that membership was open to *all* Christians: Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Catholics. But before anyone could be accepted for membership, he would be investigated to see whether he met the requirements of the organization, that is, was he a Christian. These Christian soldiers would begin defending Christianity the second "one drop of Christian blood has been shed . . . and if a drop of Christian blood is shed on this soil, there won't be a Communist left to gloat over it."[53]

In September Daniel Kurtz and Raymond Dalton used a new fear tactic in their attempt to recruit members for a unified front—that woman and children needed to be protected from the immorality of communist forces. Not only were communists intent on butchering Christian women and children, but communists would also unleash "free love" on Christian America. Kurtz warned, "If this country did not fight communism then people will see their children treated immorally and then murdered in their presence while a bayonet is held against their throat." They vowed that it was the Front's duty to "protect and preserve the womanhood and our children from being raped by those Communistic mongrels." The battleground between the "uncontrollable bestial hordes" of communism and Christianity would be the streets of New York City.[54]

Fronters often complained about being victims of communist violence and vandalism in New York simply because they were Catholics or Christians. Owen King spoke about his experience at Union Square, where he claimed that he and four other distributors of *Social Justice* were "kicked and mauled" by communists. Joe Hartery warned the communists to stop painting the hammer and sickle on Christian Church doors, promising he would retaliate for every defaced door, broken window, and molested priest or nun by beating two or three communist youth.[55]

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52. Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 2, 1939; Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Bureau Criminal Alien Investigation, September 11, 1939; Police Report, September 14, 1939; Det. Edward F. Rogers to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, November 17, 1939, OFC.

53. Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Information Bureau, July 7, 1939; Police Report, July 11, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 16, 1939; Police Report, September 11, 1939; Police Report, September 14, 1939; Police Report, September 15, 1939, OFC.

54. Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, July 19, 1939; Report of Meeting, Lt. Kelly, 104th Pct., September 1, 1939; Police Report, September 2, 1939; Police Report, September 6, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939; Police Report, September 11, 1939; Police Report, September 15, 1939; Police Report, September 23, 1939, OFC.

55. Police Report, June 14, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 11, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 14, 1939;

To prove their value as defenders of the faith, one Front speech focused on 5,000 communists picketing the Italian Consul across the street from St. Patrick's Cathedral. Picketers supposedly gathered in front of the cathedral after Easter services, where they insulted and spat on female parishioners and threw prayer books and beads on the sidewalk after tearing them from congregants' hands. A few weeks later, when communists gathered again, 250 Christian Front men stood against 4,000 communists in front of the cathedral.[56]

Other public institutions, ranging from the City College of New York (CCNY) to the New York Police Department, were called hotbeds of communist activity or susceptible to a communist takeover. CCNY was referred to as the "Communist College of New York," whose "crack-pot" educators encouraged their students to insult and abuse religious worshippers and march for "peace and democracy" with "that wonderful body of men," the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.[57]

Internal city politics helped the Front transform their general distrust of CCNY students during the summer of 1939 into a full-blown conspiracy theory. Paul Kern, the brash member of LaGuardia's junior brain-trust and head of the Civil Service Commission, embroiled himself in a power-play over control of the Parks Department with *the* New York City powerbroker, Robert Moses. Moses leaked material from an investigative file smearing Kern as a communist. When Kern began a program of giving points toward promotion for municipal employees who reported corruption, Moses denounced Kern as a representative of the Soviets in America and his plan as "un-American." Both Father Coughlin and the Christian Front characterized Kern's plan as a plot for a communist takeover of the Police Department.[58]

Social Justice reported on Kern's plan in early September. The article was read aloud at Christian Front street meetings in Queens on September 9 and 10. Kern's "Secret Police," the Front claimed, would oversee and spy on Christian police officers, thereby demoralizing the police force, destroying fifty years of progress, and eventually forcing out all Christians from the department. With no experienced, courageous Christian police officers who knew how to respond to emergencies, the door would be open for communists to gain full control of the city. Preference for agents of the "Russian-Sovietized-Communistic-OGPU-styled" secret police would go to Kern's favorites, "college boys" from "red CCNY" who "don't know the difference between a nightstick and salami." Audiences at the rallies were urged to protest the merit and pro-

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Report of Meeting, Sgt. Roulston, 30 Pct., August 8, 1939; Police Report, August 18, 1939; Police Report, December 5, 1939, OFC.

56. Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Information Bureau, July 7, 1939, OFC.

57. Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, July 12, 1939; Police Report, July 23, 1939; Det. Joseph Carrington to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 31, 1939, OFC.

58. Thomas Kessner, *Fiorello H. LaGuardia and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1989), 487–88.

motion system in the department, sign petitions against this "Communist Move," and send them to City Hall with "enough signatures it would take six months to read them all."[59] As autumn turned to winter, Kern's plan was still on the minds of CF speakers. By November the "spy system" was characterized as more evidence of a Jewish plot within the city. LaGuardia was accused of replacing thirty sergeants at the switchboard with thirty civilians, twenty-seven of whom were Jews, whose purpose was to spy on the Christian police. Ironically, Daniel Kurtz told this story to fewer people than supposedly had been replaced at the switchboard—as only twenty people were standing to hear him on the corner of Liberty Avenue and Lefferts Boulevard.[60]

Front speakers were well aware that the New York Police Department (NYPD) was monitoring their activities at least one month before it was revealed publicly in September 1939. The presence of officers and detectives emboldened Front speakers to denounce the police. Albert Gunnison used police attendance as "proof" that Mayor LaGuardia was anti-Christian and pro-communist and trying to deflect attention from his administration because note taking only occurred at "Christian" meetings and not at communist meetings. However, the Front also said the police were not necessarily to blame because they were just following orders of the "little red mayor." Speakers always turned the investigations of the Alien Squad back on the mayor, asking what the "Little Flower" was afraid of. The squad would perform a real service if they investigated LaGuardia and "tell the public who he really is." The Christian Front was certainly prepared to tell the public who LaGuardia really was.[61]

In fact, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia seems to have been seen by the Fronters as their real enemy. He was a target of poisonous barbs throughout the summer of 1939. Taunts directed at LaGuardia included "little red stinkweed," "a mental degenerate and bum," associate of communists, and of being a communist himself. In September the police controversy, LaGuardia's prohibition on protests in front of foreign consulates, and his limits on the number of CF pickets allowed in front of municipal radio station WMCA (where Coughlinites had been protesting Father Coughlin's removal from the radio station for almost a year) drew the ire of the Front. LaGuardia's reduction in the number of CF pickets while communists could speak unmolested on WMCA was called "purely an act of Christian persecution."[62]

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59. Police Report, September 11, 1939; Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Bureau Criminal Alien Investigation, September 11, 1939; Police Report, September 12, 1939; Police Report, September 15, 1939; Police Report, September 23, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, October 5, 1939; Police Report, October 7, 1939, OFC.

60. Police Report, November 22, 1939, OFC.

61. *New York Times*, September 14, 1939. Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 2, 1939; Det. William A. Justy to Commanding Officer, Bureau of Criminal Alien Investigation, August 4, 1939; Police Report, August 18, 1939; Police Report, August 31, 1939; Det. William A. Kuntz to Commanding Officer, Alien Squad, September 8, 1939, OFC.

62. Det. Joseph Carrington to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 31, 1939; Det. Joseph Carrington to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, September 8, 1939; Police Report, September 23, 1939, OFC.

Daniel Kurtz even invented a fanciful biography for the mayor, questioning his ancestry and patriotism—this despite LaGuardia's having left his freshman seat in the House of Representatives in 1917 to join the American forces, eventually being sent to Italy.[63] Kurtz tried to discredit the mayor, using his Jewish roots to link him to a communist conspiracy to overthrow the government. Kurtz talked about LaGuardia's Jewish mother, Irene, and also claimed that he was married to a Jew (LaGuardia's wife, Marie, was actually Lutheran). Speaking to an Italian audience, Kurtz asked, "What has the Mayor done for you? When LaGuardia was looking for your vote, he said he was Italian . . . but he is not Italian, but a Jew who is following in the footsteps of his Jewess mother's race."

The story departed further from the truth when Kurtz claimed that the mayor, a captain in the aviation corps during the First World War, had spread "the evil doctrine of communism in Hungary" by smuggling communist literature into the country and organizing the communists. This led to "the overthrow of the respective government by Bela Kun, alias Aaron Cohen (more Jewish-conspiracy), and 60,000 Christians murdered or mutilated." After Hungary, LaGuardia supposedly helped Kun organize communists in Italy and flew out of Barcelona and Switzerland with contraband. Kurtz hoped that after the public heard this story, the "truth" about LaGuardia, the mayor would never get another vote from a Christian and would not be "elected janitor, let alone a third term as Mayor."[64]

Kurtz and his fellow speakers did not always have to invent anecdotes for their diatribes against the mayor. At the opening of the Soviet Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair, LaGuardia had said that the Russian people had the right to any government they choose and that our own government was a result of a "bloody revolution" that was "not very popular with the dynasties of Europe at the time." Father Edward Lodge Curran, president of the International Catholic Truth Society and ardent supporter of the Christian Front, denounced LaGuardia's speech and said, "real Americans resent[ed] the fact that the most prominent object at the World's Fair . . . is the red star at the top of the building of Soviet Russia . . . which stands for the destruction of the rights of God and the rights of humanity."[65]

Fronters claimed LaGuardia's words had let "the Little Flower LaGuardia show his true colors." They called for a boycott of the World's Fair; LaGuardia was told he should concentrate on local matters, such as jobs and the reduction of taxes, and not try to solve European economic problems. LaGuardia was also accused of forcing police to sell tickets to the World's Fair to see the "big red building."[66]

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63. Kessner, *Fiorello H. LaGuardia*, 47–60.

64. Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 11, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 25, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939; Police Report, September 11, 1939; Police Report, September 23, 1939, OFC.

65. *New York Times*, May 18, 1939.

66. Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Information Bureau, July 7, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, July 21, 1939; Report of Meeting, Lt.

Christian Fronters exploited widespread resentment of the Soviet flag's prominence at the World's Fair, and they demanded that the American flag be raised higher than the red star of communism. The controversy ended only when the "Paul Reveres of Astoria," a patriotic Christian organization, purchased a plot of land on the highest spot in the vicinity, planning to erect a 450-foot pole with a 20-foot American flag and a 20-foot banner with a Christian cross. At that point, LaGuardia ordered an American flag raised on a pole at the parachute site, 30 feet higher than the red star, all without ceremony.[67]

LaGuardia was certainly bothered by the Front, but he told the *New York Times* that the situation was under "proper observance" and that he would not suppress views contrary to his own. He also stated, however, that inciting rioting and espousing racial and religious hatred did not fall under free speech, and those cases would be dealt with properly under the law.[68]

The second person in the city despised by Fronters was the communist president of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), Michael Quill. Elected president of the TWU in the fall of 1935, Quill faced sustained opposition from the Catholic Church and Church-affiliated organizations once it became apparent that the left-leaning union had become an important force within the Irish community. Again, it was Father Curran who led the opposition to Quill's TWU and continued to lead it for years.[69]

Lodge and the Front attacked and disparaged Quill's Catholicism. Because the TWU was a de facto Irish union, the Front appealed to the union membership's sense of Irish Catholic pride. Quill was denounced as a "degenerate" for turning against the Irish people and for allowing his union to become infested with communists. Irish in the Front crowds, a significant number of them no doubt members of the TWU, were told the union would soon investigate Quill and "chase him to the other end of Ireland, for he is only an Irish Communist."[70]

Front speakers claimed they were defending their cultural inheritance, unifying all Christians and exterminating communism, atheism, and all other un-American "isms" by "upholding the spirit and ideals of Christianity . . . under the flag and cross of Jesus Christ." In an ironic twist, Christian Front speaker James McCluskey, trying to explain to the crowd of five hundred gathered in Washington Heights exactly why he was there,

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Stauffer, 105th Pct., July 20, 1939; Police Report, July 23, 1939; Police Report, July 26, 1939; Det. William A. Justy to Commanding Officer, Bureau of Criminal Alien Investigation, August 4, 1939; Police Report, August 19, 1939; Det. Mario J. Fochi to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Squad, September 7, 1939, OFC.

67. Daniel Kurtz, Springfield Blvd. and Jamaica Ave., Queens (July 6, 1939), and Beach 117th St. and Rockaway Beach Blvd., Queens (August 26, 1939). Det. Stanley Gwozdo to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Information Bureau, July 7, 1939; Police Report, August 26, 1939,OFC.

68. *New York Times*, July 21, 1939.

69. Joshua B. Freeman, "Catholics, Communists, and Republicans: Irish Workers and the Organization of the Transport Workers Union," in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Michael H. Frisch (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 273–74.

70. Det. William A. Justy to Commanding Officer, Bureau of Criminal Alien Investigation, August 4, 1939; Police Report, August 16, 1939, OFC.

used Nazi imagery to explain CF patriotism, saying they were the "Storm Troopers of Christ and Americanism."[71]

Richard Gid Powers explains that America needed a principled anticommunism in the 1930s to find a principled defense of democracy against both communism and fascism. Some anticommunists fell short of this standard and so became vulnerable to the charge that they were at heart fascists, only using their anticommunism as a weapon against Jews and their other political enemies. Certainly, the Christian Front's unsophisticated, crude anticommunism, in which they proclaimed themselves the protectors of a Christian America that existed only in their collective minds, numbered them among the many who failed the test of a principled defense of democracy against communism.[72]

The Christian Fronters defined themselves as the standard-bearers of Americanism, battling enemies who had taken over what to them was an exclusively Christian America, their foes being a cabal of communists, internationalists, and Jews. Fronters saw themselves as true—even truer—Americans because they were going to restore Christianity to America. Anticommunism was going to lead the country to this goal.

The Front's boisterous rants on the streets of New York certainly caught the attention of Jewish groups, Fiorello LaGuardia, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, all of whom viewed the CF version of Americanism as just as subversive as communism or Nazism. In the end, the Front's attempt to present themselves as the embodiment and sole custodians of mainstream America only pushed the group further out on the extremist fringe of American politics. Pathetic attendance at meetings toward the end of 1939, often less than fifty individuals, led Fronter Raymond Dalton to urge members gathered in Sangerbund Hall to "work as hard as the communists do to increase membership . . . the Christian Front has recently received publicity as a powerful Christian organization, and if the enemy saw the attendance at these meetings they would know the real truth." Dalton's audience numbered only twenty people.[73]

71. Det. Joseph Carrington to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Bureau, July 31, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation, August 16, 1939; Police Report, August 31, 1939; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau; Ptl. Fred G. Graumann to Commanding Officer, Criminal Alien Investigation Bureau, October 5, 1939, OFC.

72. Powers, *Not Without Honor*, 117.

73. Police Report, November 28, 1939, OFC.